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SUBJECT: REACHING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AFGHAN LEADERS THROUGH
UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

REF: Kabul 1037

¶1. SUMMARY: Reftel provided an overview of Afghan higher education and post's efforts to engage various institutions throughout the country. As it notes, all major Afghan political movements of the 20th century started among students and faculty of Kabul University, including the communists, the Islamists, and the radical Islamists. While USAID and a number of U.S. educational institutions are involved in a small number of partnerships with individual universities, the American presence on university campuses is minimal. The social sciences, journalism and the humanities in particular suffer from a lack of partnership opportunities. Given the importance of the higher education sector in developing the next generation of Afghan leaders, post recommends that ECA/A establish a university partnership program for reaching this vital constituency.
End summary.

¶2. While the Ministry of Education has funding for a huge textbook development project and teacher training, the Ministry of Higher Education does not. USAID's Office of Democracy and Governance has worked to produce a number of law textbooks now in use at American University of Afghanistan (AUAF). USAID's Office of Economic Growth has established a Bachelor in Business program at Kabul University; 150 students will graduate with this degree this year. A select group of graduating seniors will participate in a three-month training program in Small and Medium Enterprise Development in Afghanistan (?), followed by a three-month internship.

¶3. USAID supports a number of other initiatives. In addition to upgrading skills of university faculty, staff, and students across the country, its programs have provided 138 scholarships so that faculty and ministry staff could obtain certificates and graduate degrees at regional and American universities. Many stateside institutions, including Washington State University, Indiana University and the University of Massachusetts, in addition to Stanford, are implementing partners or sub-contractors for USAID projects. Purdue has also worked with Afghan universities in the field of agriculture.

¶4. For instance, Washington State University is implementing a five-year, \$12 million USAID cooperative agreement that facilitates alliances between Afghan institutions and partners in the U.S., India, Japan, Europe, Africa, and the Philippines. As a result, Afghan faculty and administrators have been sent to these partner institutions, and foreign counterparts have taught at Afghan institutions. Their increased common knowledge base, improved attitudes and skills have contributed to updated curriculum, syllabi, and online content in key academic areas. This cooperative agreement will continue through June 2011.

¶5. The World Bank has been involved in supporting some university partnerships, such as the Kansas State - Kabul U/Balkh U partnerships in Engineering and English. Professors at Herat University's Engineering faculty have also benefited from WB-funded training at the University of Connecticut-Hartford. Some German universities have supported IT partnerships. Herat University also enjoys partnerships with various universities in Europe, Asia, and

Iran.

¶16. With the exception of the above-named partnerships, the American presence on university campuses is quite minimal. The social sciences, journalism and humanities are particularly lacking in partnership opportunities. We believe that a USG-funded program supporting university partnerships would not only help fill the current void in higher education, but also demonstrate a lasting American commitment.

¶17. Our vision of partnerships includes a focus on four broad objectives: the exchange of faculty; creating a common knowledge base (consisting of new library acquisitions and translations of texts); enhancing educational technologies; and engaging in collaborative research. Partnerships should also include exchange opportunities for undergraduates, an area of need not currently addressed by ongoing ECA programs.

¶18. The current security environment precludes the implementation of university partnerships such as we saw in the former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries, but we believe that with some modification, Afghanistan could reap many of the same rewards. Other university partnerships have cited some of the following benefits:

-- Both partners learned to work effectively together in a complex exchange of ideas, experiences and values. They emerged with a deeper understanding of academic and cultural differences and similarities, and found new common ground.

-- The partnership enriched and modernized curricula, as well as incorporated technology in the educational process.

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-- Past exchanges resulted in positive attitudes toward the United States after students visited the U.S., and continued interaction with American academic colleagues.

¶19. Existing models of university partnerships would need to be modified to take the security situation into account. We realize this will include significantly more support from the Embassy/PRTs, fewer Americans traveling to Afghanistan, and a greater focus on rebuilding infrastructure, especially in terms of materials, internet, and digital technologies that would enable video conferencing to bring partners together. While World Bank partnerships have American faculty actually working full-time on Afghan campuses, we do not recommend our taking responsibility for the security of these individuals. The Embassy/PRTs would be ready to provide support for initial assessments and short term visits.

¶10. Partnerships would benefit from having a returned Fulbrighter or other Afghan who has gone through the American educational system serving as an impartial project manager on the ground. Such a person would be in the best position to understand both sides and candidly communicate with the partners.

¶11. We also believe that the likeliest candidates for partnerships are in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif (Balkh University), given the relatively secure environment. These universities have also expressed the most interest in partnerships and have some experience already in working with Americans. Given existing partnerships in the fields of English, Engineering and Agriculture, post recommends that a proposed university partnership program focus on social sciences, journalism, and humanities. Herat University could also benefit from a partnership for its medical faculty.

¶12. The absence, by and large, of western faculty teaching and researching at Afghan universities, the small percent of classes taught in English, and the paucity of scholarships for Afghan faculty and students to study in the west are ceding the ground to others. By putting more effort and funding into university partnerships, we will be enhancing not only today's generation of students, but also future security and development for Afghanistan. ECA/A should take advantage of this opportunity by establishing a university partnership program for Afghanistan.

